

"Raising Chickens" by Simms High School Student—11th grade

It used to be that chickens were kept by many in small coops and shed because they were their sole source of eggs and meat. However, times have changed. Now, people get their eggs and meat from supermarkets, and chickens are kept in huge barns, reared especially for some future purpose, be it stew pot, frying pan, or egg production. But individuals can still raise chickens successfully with a minimum of muss and fuss. The benefits of raising chickens far outweigh the time and expense involved.

Chickens can be a nuisance. They can and will decimate a garden. They can be noisy. They can cause problems with neighbors, if you live in a town, by doing the preceding two things. Chickens are an open invitation for predators like rats, weasels, and birds of prey. They also can have lice, and mice can get into feed. Butchering chickens can be messy, and if you become attached to them it can be a distasteful process. But, many of these problems can be overcome with the proper housing and confinement. All chickens really require is a place to roost, a nest box, and a small run area for a dust bath and a place to pick up grit for their digestion. This can easily be made from an old apple crate on its side, with a small space outside that is wired in with 1" mesh wire. This is good setup for one or two chickens, but more will require a somewhat larger space. Any old shack or barn can readily be converted to house chickens. The complexity is limited only by the ambition involved. Also, bantams, which are approximately one-half the size of the normal breeds, require less space and feed, and so are a viable alternative when there is little space available.

Chickens, if managed properly, are quite easy to take care of. They can be fed largely from table leavings and lawn clippings. Commercial feed is usually fed also, each type tailored for the particular purpose the keeper will put them to. It can be expensive, but by providing the afore-mentioned food, its use can be cut down quite substantially. They require a constant source of water. If kept fed and watered, chickens will more or less look after themselves. All that is required of the keeper is to replenish the feed and water, and to clean the coop occasionally, and to gather the eggs. Chicken manure is excellent fertilizer. And, if one of your hens gets broody,

that is, wants to set all the time, you can have a batch of little chicks in about three weeks. For all of the particulars on this process, the keeper should read up on it at the library. If the keeper is successful, the flock should keep on going for a long while, without having to buy replacements.

The prime reason for keeping chickens, however, is that for your possibly small investment, you get eggs and meat. These should almost definitely be of a finer quality than available in stores, and there may also be some degree of self-satisfaction at eating products produced by nature and yourself. Possibly, the eggs and meat might be sold. Before selling, though, eggs should have a light shone through them, or be candled, to detect blood spots. They are harmless, but to some, are very unappetizing. For those who can't bear the thought of butchering their chickens, butchers will usually do it for a small fee, or maybe by some friend whose price may only be some eggs or meat. Even with only a couple of chickens, the keeper could be kept in eggs all year long, for what you pay for feed.

As it has been illustrated, it can now be seen that the benefits of raising chickens far outweigh the time and expense involved in the process. Individuals can and do raise chicken to supply themselves with eggs and meat. They don't have to depend on supermarkets for their supply of these commodities. Chickens no longer have to spend their existence in one of the big commercial barns. More and more of them are spending their lives in previously unused sheds, and even old rundown coups. Times have changed, again.

Reading Strategy #3

- What's the author's purpose in writing this? (to inform, argue or persuade, entertain)
- What's the subject?
- What's the author's opinion about the subject?
- How do you know that's the author's opinion? (Evidence)
- Where is the thesis statement?